

Structural Engineering Certification Board (SECB)

BACKGROUND

In the past few years the Board has received a number of complaints against California civil engineers using the designation SECB in signature title blocks. As these civil engineers are not yet licensed as Structural Engineers in California, the use of SECB appears to violate the California Business and Professions Code Sections 6736 and 6787. These code sections prohibit the use of the title "structural engineer" or any combination or abbreviation of these words by anyone who is not licensed as a California Structural Engineer. There are approximately 147 members of SECB in California, 45 of whom are licensed California civil engineers, but not licensed as structural engineers in California.

SECB is a private, non-governmental organization established to identify and declare approved applicant engineers as "certified in the practice of structural engineering" (see Attachment A). The SECB is located in Illinois, and certifies engineers throughout the country. Certification by SECB requires a review of the applicant's education, experience and examinations. SECB does not administer examinations but requires applicants to have taken and passed the NCEES Structural II Examination, and meet specified education and experience requirements. SECB encourages those certified to use "SECB" following their name and title (Joe Smith, PE, SECB). The initial application cost to become an SECB is \$350.

POSITION

The spring 2010 Board Bulletin included an article notifying licensees that the acronym SECB cannot be used by those who are not licensed as a structural engineer in California. The Board had also contacted SECB regarding the complaints and SECB agreed to notify all California licensees that use of SECB as a title would be in violation of state law unless the licensee is also certified by California as a structural engineer.

More recently the SECB proposed that SECB certification holders not licensed by the Board be required to include an asterisk after the SECB designation and the words "not licensed as a structural engineer in California" be prominently placed explaining the asterisk. This proposal was reviewed with the Board's legal counsel and approved by letter dated October 19, 2010, from David E. Brown to SECB (see Attachment B).

The Spring 2010 newsletter article regarding this subject (see Attachment C) will be updated for the Fall 2010 edition.



[SECB HISTORY]

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The Structural Engineering Certification Board was formed to identify those professional engineers with the additional education, experience, and skills that are particular to the practice of Structural Engineering.

Structural Engineering is the science and art of designing and constructing, with efficiency and elegance, buildings, bridges, towers, tanks, frameworks and similar structures so they can safely resist the forces to which they may be subjected.

By submitting to the certification process, an engineer can demonstrate the unique qualities necessary to be certified in the practice of Structural Engineering.

Certification in the practice of Structural Engineering is not intended to supplant the licensing and regulatory rights of States and other legal jurisdictions of the United States. In fact, licensure by a recognized legal jurisdiction is a prerequisite to becoming certified in the practice of Structural Engineering.

Presently (2005), only ten States recognize the unique practice of Structural Engineering. In the future, it is envisioned that certification will facilitate licensure in states where the Structural Engineering discipline is not recognized.

In an effort to promote the public welfare and to aid stakeholders in selecting professional engineers qualified to do structural design, the National Council of Structural Engineers Association (NCSEA) met to find a solution to the problem that State licensing Boards have been ignoring for years. At NCSEA's 1998 Annual Conference in Portland, Maine, the idea of self-certification was proposed and discussed, as frustrated delegates searched for a solution. An ad hoc certification committee was formed; and the topic was discussed and researched for several years, until a vote was taken after the 2003 Annual Conference in Denver, Colorado. That vote authorized NCSEA to form the Structural Engineering Certification Board (SECB); and certification in the practice of Structural Engineering was born.

[Bylaws \[pdf\]](#)



BOARD FOR PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERS AND LAND SURVEYORS

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Attachment B

October 19, 2010

Jeanne Vogelzang, Executive Director
Structural Engineering Certification Board
645 N Michigan Avenue, Suite 540
Chicago, IL 60611

Dear Jeanne Vogelzang,

This letter is in response to your letter of May 17, 2010; and our follow-up phone call.

As you are aware, our Board has been very concerned that the use of "SECB" designation maybe causing confusion regarding the licensure status of civil engineers in California. In particular, the use of that acronym could be considered a misrepresentation for Civil Engineers to indicate that they are "Certified to Practice Structural Engineering by the Structural Engineering Certification Board." Only the states' licensing agencies have the legal authority to certify and license individuals to practice structural engineering. Therefore the use of "SECB" designation alone could be a violation of Section 6736 of the California Business and Professions Code.

I appreciate the fact the SECB shares and endorses our Board's goal of ensuring that all Structural Engineers in California are duly qualified and licensed. You have indicated that the SECB is prepared to require all California Civil Engineers who are not yet licensed as a Structural Engineer in California to place an asterisk after the "SECB" designation. The asterisk clarification would state that the engineer is not licensed as a Structural Engineer in California.

After careful consideration, the Board will not oppose or challenge the use of the "SECB*" designation by your certificate holders, provided the asterisk is in place with the appropriate clarifying information. However, without the use of the asterisk and clarifying information our Board will need to re-consider the use of the "SECB" designation alone as an issue requiring further review as stated above. We will also publish an article about this in our next scheduled newsletter due this fall.

Thank you for your patience and working to resolve these potential conflicts. If you have questions or if we can provide additional information, please contact Susan Christ directly at (916) 263-2247 or by email at Susan_Christ@dca.ca.gov.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "David E. Brown", is written over the typed name.

David E. Brown
Executive Officer

contract for engineering projects as long as the civil engineer stamps and signs all of the work?

A: No. It is a misdemeanor (and in some cases a felony) violation pursuant to B&P Code section 6787(a) for any person who is not licensed to practice or offer to practice civil, electrical, or mechanical engineering. In addition, when operating an engineering business, all requirements described in B&P Code section 6738 must be met. If the requirements are not met, the licensee could be considered to be aiding and abetting in the unlicensed practice, or offering to practice, civil engineering.

Q: Can a civil engineer offer and practice structural engineering?

A: Yes. Civil engineering embraces structural engineering; therefore, a civil engineer may offer and practice structural engineering. However, a civil engineer may only use the title "Structural Engineer" if he or she has obtained the second license as a Structural Engineer.

EARTHQUAKE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

safety. It is our duty as professionals to use the tools at our disposal to protect the public. The Ferndale earthquake highlights the importance of inundation maps in our profession. Please visit the CGS website and review the maps pertinent to your area of practice, and stay tuned for more from the Gorda Plate.

General information collected from:
www.usgs.gov, www.conservation.ca.gov,
 and www.news.nationalgeographic.com.

Important Notice Regarding the Structural Engineering Certification Board

Are you a California licensed civil engineer who has also been certified by the Structural Engineering Certification Board (SECB) in Chicago, Illinois?

If so, it is important to know that you CANNOT use SECB in your signature block or list your SECB certification as licensing information on your resume without also being licensed by the State of California as a Structural Engineer. California Business and Professions Code Sections 6736 and 6787 prohibit anyone who is not licensed by the State of California as a structural engineer from using a title which makes it appear that he or she has such a license. Section 6736 states that "No person shall use the title 'Structural Engineer,' or any combination of these words or abbreviation thereof, unless he or she is a licensed civil engineer in this state and unless he or she has been found qualified as a structural engineer according to the rules and regulations established for structural engineers by the board." SECB, when used as a personal title, includes an abbreviation of title "Structural Engineer" in combination with other words or abbreviations.

The Board for Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors (BPELS) has contacted SECB concerning numerous complaints received regarding civil engineers who are illegally using the certification to misrepresent their licensing status in California. SECB responded by agreeing to notify all California licensees that the use of SECB as a title would be in violation of state law unless the licensee is also certified by California as a structural engineer.

SECB certification DOES NOT take the place of being licensed as a structural engineer in California, and its use to denote an engineer's licensing status or primary license specialization is a violation of state law which could result in disciplinary action. BPELS can and will take administrative action against those civil engineers who violate the law. Individuals who are not yet State certified, but who wish to advertise as primarily providing structural engineering services, should consider taking the California structural engineering examination.

For questions about becoming a licensed structural engineer in California, go to the BPELS Web site: <http://www.pels.ca.gov/applicants/apps.shtml>.